

Lord, Increase Our Faith.

and the **same** **and** **the** **same** **and** **the** **same**

A SERMON

BY

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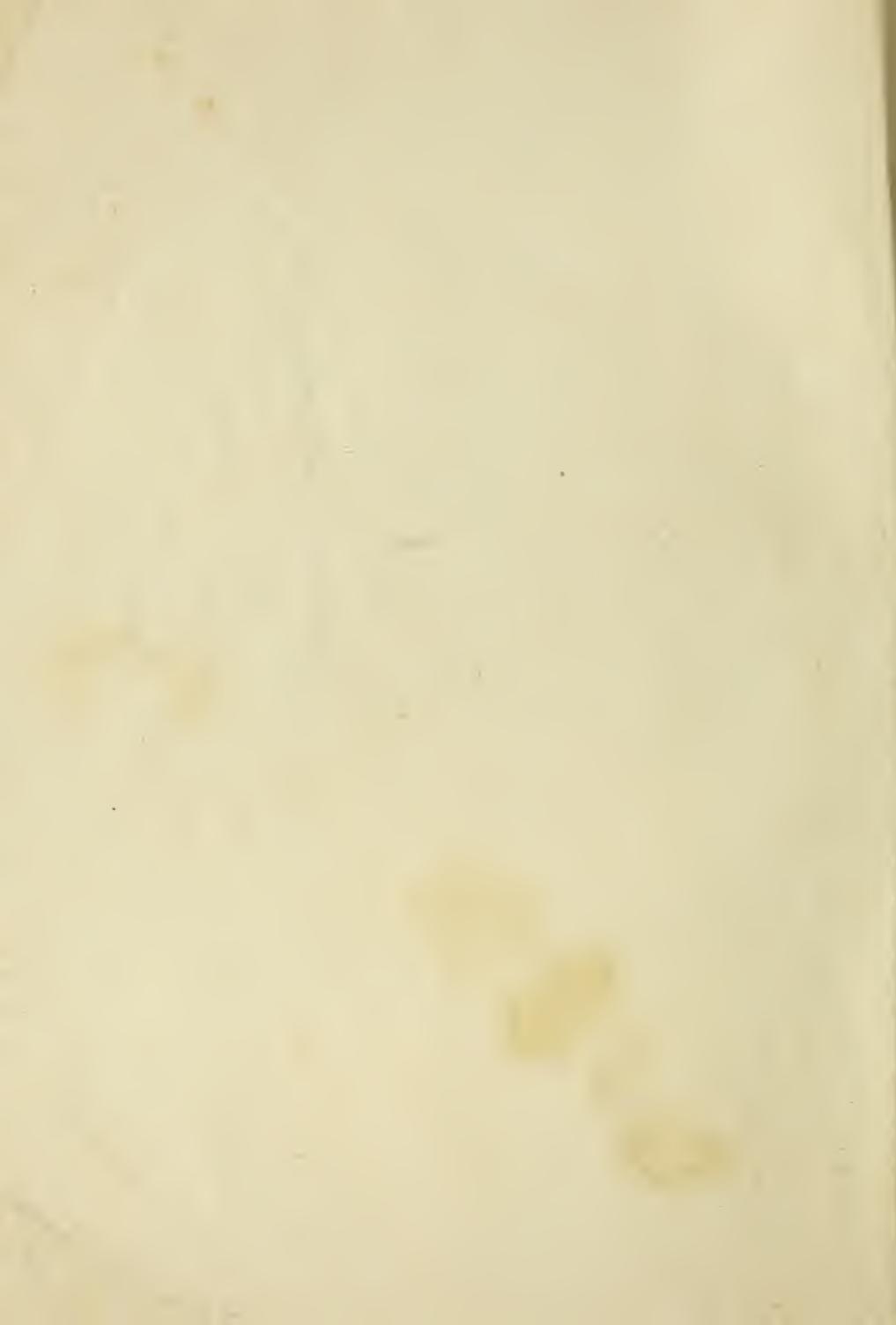
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“And the Apostles said unto the Lord, *Increase our faith.*”—LUKE 17:5.

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Lord, Increase Our Faith.

What is faith?

The belief in a certain creed is not faith, but only one branch of faith.

The belief in the existence of Jesus Christ is not faith, but only one root of faith.

Nor is faith the mere believing that God will grant some particular thing we ask for.

Faith is a vastly larger and more comprehensive thing than this, underlying our whole character and life.

“Faith is the substance of things hoped for, the evidence of things not seen.” To have faith, is to receive and live in the unseen and spiritual world as an everlasting solid reality. So that heaven and hell, God’s promises, and God’s threatenings, are as real to us as sunlight and darkness; purity and truth, godliness and love, and all spiritual qualities are as substantial as gold, or business, or land. Christ and his salvation and eternal life, are as solid verities as the world on which we tread. To have faith is to receive these things not only with the intellect, but with the heart, so that

we live and move and have our being in them.

Such is the faith we want increased. And when we join with the apostles in this prayer, we have taken the first steps towards the increase of our faith. But God usually answers such prayers through some channels or laws of our being. The answer cannot be passed over to us as coins from one hand to another. No falling mantle, nor wave of prophet hand, *can* answer such prayers. Like wisdom or skill, or learning, which cannot be given by teacher to scholar, however much some parents expect it of them, they must be wrought into our nature through certain natural laws or methods.

Let us consider, then, some of the ways in which God increases our faith.

I. "Faith cometh by hearing, and hearing by the Word of God."

The thoughtful reading of the Bible, the bringing of its truths and promises clearly before us, and keeping them there, talking often about them with believers, meditating upon them day and night till the atmosphere that surrounds us is the fresh mountain air from the hills of God's promises or the breath from the ocean of his truth; till, as the space around the Christ-child in Raphael's Sistine Madonna is filled solid with angels' faces, so we keep God's promises and truths around us on every side, and whichever way we look we see those messengers from heaven; this is the first

means of increasing our faith. Those who seldom read the Bible will not have strong faith. The best defence against the attacks of infidelity, is the Bible itself. Get men to read the Bible thoughtfully, not to find fault with it, but to learn its truths, and in most cases you have cured their infidelity. The best remedy against the assaults of *doubt* is like Thomas to touch the wounded hands and side of the Crucified one,—to come in contact with the truth itself; and there will we, like him, cry out, “My Lord, and My God!”

We may learn how to increase our faith by watching the methods by which doubt, its opposite, multiplies. Doubt comes not like the attack of an *army*, but like the attack of a *disease*. We breathe in the poisoned air from neighboring marshes, we bring the deadly sewer-gas into our houses by the very triumph of modern conveniences, cesspools in hundreds of yards send up their malaria to enter every open window in summer, and then in winter we shut up every crack and crevice lest God’s pure air enter our rooms, to save coal; till our whole systems are poisoned, and in some hour of weakness or overwork, suddenly, we are consumed with a burning fever. If the fever had come like a deadly serpent, we would have avoided it; if it had come like the north wind, we would have sheltered ourselves from it; if in battle array, we could fight it. But it has

come with our daily breath, its footsteps unheard, without knocking at the door, and has insidiously poisoned our whole system before we were aware of our danger.

So doubts enter the soul. If they came by argument we could answer them, for the argument is on the other side. If they came openly, it would be like an army of rumsellers and drunkards making war upon temperance ; their very looks would defeat them. Doubts enter by sneers, by insinuations, by hints, by low suggestions ; a moral malaria. Satan has taught man to disbelieve in his own existence, and his place of punishment, that he may put man's soul off its guard against his evils. How has he taught them? By arguments? No. By proofs? No. By reason? No. But by teaching them to take his name in vain ; by levity and laughter in literature, by sneers and hints, and an all pervasive atmosphere of levity. Even good men and good books sometimes aid him by speaking trivially of these terrible realities. Men always lose faith in that which they take lightly on their tongues. And this is the reason why God holds up the Third Commandment, "Thou shalt not take the name of the Lord thy God in vain." This is the deadly nature of profanity. Because to take God's name in vain is to raise up an army of doubts. Oaths are like the dragon's teeth sown by Cadmus of old ; from them spring a

harvest of armed giants of doubt and unbelief. There is no possible way in which you can make God seem a myth, an unreality, and destroy his power over men, more easily than by taking his name lightly on the lips.

The danger to young men is not from the direct attacks of infidelity. Unbelievers may fling volume after volume at you like a hail storm, and you can let them alone. They can argue like Mephistopheles, and you can grow stronger in faith by answering their arguments. You can dodge stones and beams, but not malaria; and here is the danger, that you will dwell among unbelieving companions who, will not so much argue as hint; sneers will be continually flung upon the Bible and Christians; interrogation points will be written after the promises; doubts suggested, and slurs put upon divine truths and religious hopes, till the very atmosphere is tainted with doubt. Then, at last, when he is in trouble, and his soul hungers, and coming to himself, he longs for some solid ground to stand on, the whole Bible will seem a mirage in the air. On every promise that could give comfort and hope, is seen the ghastly interrogation mark. He works for his Saviour, and those sneers blur his vision. He longs for the sight of heaven, and clouds of doubt have covered it.

Now, the way to increase faith is the exact counterpart of this. Live in an atmosphere of

faith. Breathe in the promises for your daily breath. A man taught his canary bird to sing "Home Sweet Home" in this way:—"He placed the canary in a room where it could not hear the singing of other birds, suspended its cage from the ceiling, so that it would see its reflection in a mirror, and beneath the glass placed a musical box that was regulated to play no other tune but "Home, Sweet Home." Hearing no other song but this, the young canary soon began to try the notes, and finally got so that it sang the song perfectly." So listen ye continually to the music of God's promises; abide often and long within the sound of your Bible truths; talk with Christians who have faith; often gather together to talk about these things; and you will find your doubting nature

"Changed like the world's great scene, when without noise
The rising sun night's vulgar light destroys."

It is the fresh air that kills the miasm, and invigorates the soul. Climb God's mountains of prayer; live on the hill lands of his promises; bathe in the sunlight of his truth, and your doubts will flee like the hosts of "specters pale" that beleagured the city of Prague. At the tolling of the bell for prayer,

"The midnight phantoms feel the spell,
The shadows sweep away,
Down the broad vale of tears afar

The spectral camp is fled.
Faith shineth as a morning star,
Our ghastly (doubts) are dead."

II. God increases our faith by showing us the actual fulfilment of His promises. The giant Antaeus, in wrestling with Hercules, doubled his strength every time he touched the earth. And our faith renews its strength every time it touches the solid ground of Fact. God's promises have sustained others in trials and needs like ours; therefore they will sustain us. Christ's words calmed the sea that raged and stormed like the one that is tossing us; therefore, when we see Him walking on the waters, we know that the winds and the waves will again obey his "Peace, be still." The history of God's people is full of monuments of his promises. And when we see in our own past and all around us the Bunker Hills, the Gettysburgs, and Gibralters of Faith's triumphs, we begin to say anew to our souls: "Why art thou cast down, oh! my soul? and why art thou disquieted within me? Hope thou within me."

We are reminded, sometimes by our own unbelieving hearts, of the ancient philosopher in the heathen temple, gazing at the votive offerings which the sailors, saved from drowning, had hung there in gratitude to the goddess who had heard their prayers for rescue, saying: "Where are the memorials of the sail-

ors that were drowned, praying in vain?" So we are asked: History is full of monuments to promises fulfilled—where are the monuments of those that have failed? You have books full of answers to prayers—where are the volumes that contain the prayers that are not answered? THERE ARE NONE. THERE ARE NONE. Because there never have been any failures in God's promises, and there are no prayers of faith that have not been answered. We imagine and fear this sometimes, because we put on God's promises what God never put there, and then, when these fancies vanish and our false expectations fail, we think God's promises have failed. We mistook the mist on its brow for the mountain; and when the mist took wing, we thought the mountain had gone.

I heard Principal Dawson of Canada tell this story of his childhood. The church which he attended when a boy had among its stained glass windows one representing Moses carrying the two tables of stone down from Mount Sinai. As he grew older he noticed that the artist had made the stones very large, weighing at least half a ton apiece. He quickly saw that it was impossible for Moses to carry a ton of stone in his arms. *Therefore*, with boyish logic, he disbelieved the Bible account of Moses and the two tables of stone, as impossible and absurd; never thinking that it

was the pictured windows and not the Bible that told this absurd story ; and he should have disbelieved, not the Bible, but the pictures, and the artist who distorted and misinterpreted the Bible and put there what the the Bible never put there.

So men make imaginary pictures of God's promises, distort them, change them, and when these pictures are not realized, they say, "We have trusted God in vain."

How many times are we like the woman, who, holding in her hands the promise of faith that it should remove mountains, looked at the mountain in her back yard and prayed that it might be taken away. She looked out of the window in the morning, and seeing the mountain still there, exclaimed, "There, I knew it would not go!" Why should it? Her very exclamation showed that she had no faith, and therefore had not that on which alone the promise was conditioned. We pray for health, and then break every law God made for health ; we manufacture typhoid fevers in our yards and houses ; we eat not only like swine, but swine's flesh out of which the demons of dyspepsia have never been cast since they entered eighteen hundred years ago ; we shut out from house and church and sleeping rooms God's health-giving air, and breathe the diseases our own neglects have made ; and then complain that God does not answer our prayer for

health! Why should he? He never promised to answer prayers so utterly devoid of faith. Faith believes God's Laws as well as his Word, and uses means as well as prayer.

Then we put upon God's promises limits as to methods and times, which God never put there. We pray for better fruit, and when God does not plant new trees in our garden or rain down golden apples like manna from heaven, we think the prayer has failed. We pray that rumselling may cease; and look for God's lightning to smite the rumsellers dead, and burn up the buildings in which rum is sold—but look in vain.

Millions prayed that slavery might perish—prayed years and years, but still it seemed to flourish. No army of demons carried the slaveholders away to their own places. And men pointed at it and said: "So are God's promises unfulfilled!" Where did God promise to answer those prayers in *your* way? His sunshine and rain and imparted skill have answered, and are still answering the prayers for better fruit. All those long years of slavery, the prayers for deliverance *were being answered*. The worm was gnawing at the root of the system and the storm was brewing that should hurl it to the ground. And just as far as you have faith, faith that lives and works, God is to-day answering your prayers against the pestilence of rum. There are many things as to which

we do not know what is best for us, as health, wealth, relief from pain; and faith is not the demanding our will, the insisting on what seems best to us, but it is trusting in the wisdom and goodness and love of God. "*Thy will, not mine, be done,*" this is faith. But *my will not thine,*" is the very soul of unbelief, and forfeits the blessing. God has promised us tribulation. Christ and the Apostles, the living exemplars of God's promises, had sorrow and poverty and death. The promise is not broken in these things, because the glory and power of eternity is wrapped up in them. For the promise is only that they shall be transfigured and transformed. They mean sweeter harps. They mean brighter crowns. They mean higher thrones forever and ever.

These are the answers, the only true answers to our prayers and our faith, and in heaven we will sing His praise and cast our crowns before Him in gratitude that He answered our prayers according, not to man's wisdom, but to the wisdom and love and power of God.

Look over your lives, oh Christian! and you cannot find one hour when God's promises have failed you. Look over the history of His people, and it is full of promises fulfilled, but there is not a fragment of a broken promise to be found. When Elisha's servant was afraid because the armies of Syria were besieging them in Dothan, Elisha prayed that

his eyes might be opened, and the servant saw that the mountain was full of horses and chariots round about Elisha. If God touches our eyes we too will see all our own life and all history full of God's fulfilled promises round about us. As when Milton's archangel spoke,

"To confirm his words, out flew
Millions of flaming swords, drawn from the thighs
of mighty cherubim."

So God speaks a promise, and out fly millions of facts and experiences to confirm his words.

Whose faith does not grow stronger when he stands among God's promises fulfilled, and looking at the myriads of Christians, searches in vain for one who can say: "I trusted in God's promises, and they failed me;" but hears one great anthem from all who ever trusted in God, without one discordant voice, singing "the old, old story" that Christ has never failed one person who trusted in Him.

III. Our faith is increased by using the faith we have.

Peter bids us to add to our faith, virtue. The word he uses means "add," but also expresses the *method* of adding. *By means of your faith acquire virtue.* Use what you have as the stepping stones to what you have not.

Many years ago when they were planning the great suspension bridge over Niagara, the question arose how to get those immense iron cables across the broad torrent. A kite was

made to draw a slender twine from shore to shore, by the twine they drew a cord, by the cord a rope, by that rope a larger rope, by that a cable able to sustain and bear across the rapids the heavy iron cable with which they were to form the bridge.

We are to use our small faith as the means of gaining more faith. We are to use our faith in sustaining us in the lesser trials and duties, and thus gain a faith that will sustain us in every trial and duty of life.

The way to learn to do great things is to do little things well. The way to be "faithful in that which is much," is to "be faithful in that which is least." The way to think great thoughts, is to think out well the smaller daily thoughts. The eagle stirs up her nest and thrusts her young into the air, that they may learn to fly toward the sun, by fluttering first in the tree.

No man ever did anything well, by merely learning the theory, and then dreaming of what great things he would do if he only had the opportunity. *Crescit eundo*, he goes by going, he grows by doing.

This is God's method of increasing our faith. He gives you first the five or ten talents, that by using them you may gain faith to rule the ten cities; because he that is faithful in that which is least, by that faithfulness becomes faithful in that which is much.

Faith in smaller things contains the “Come up higher” to the wider kingdom.

The faith that slew the lion and the bear, was the father of the faith that slew the giant.

The faith that fed and guarded the sheep in the wilderness, was parent to the faith that made Israel a mighty and victorious nation.

You wish for faith to triumph in the hour of death, and bring light and peace in that gloomy conflict with the last enemy. There is but one way: Use your faith in trusting God’s promises for your common daily needs. Men’s faith fails them in the dying hour, because they failed to use God’s promises to keep them in their living hours.

You long for faith to bear you up strong and cheerful in the great trials that are sure to come; then take God’s promises with you into the little trials of ordinary life.

You pray for victory over the great temptations that make you say: “All thy waves and thy billows have gone over me.” Then trust in God and conquer your little sins; triumph over your small temptations. Your faith will fail in the hour of greater trial, unless you use it day by day.

You would do great things for Christ, would be a Moody or a Harlan Page, and “turn many unto righteousness” that you may “shine as the stars, forever and ever.” Have you taken God’s promises, and with believing

prayer, brought one soul daily before the throne? Have you used all your faith in behalf of a single soul?

Always and everywhere, the greater is gained by doing faithfully the less.

This is what we need for the increase of our faith: to use all the faith we have; to apply the promises to our daily lives. And the one talent of faith shall become ten, and the ten talents shall lead to the ten cities and the wider kingdom.

IV. God increases our faith by trying it.

A late writer has shown us that nearly all the life-saving improvements on our railroads, as the Miller platform, steam brakes, telegraphic signals, have been forced upon them by the great disasters. Each great disaster has produced new precautions against accident. So that the Norwalk disaster, the Revere catastrophe, have really saved manifold more lives than they destroyed: and we all travel far more safely than before, till it has been said that the safest place a man can find is on an express train at full speed.

So will we find that the times of despondency and darkness, when we feel after God and cannot find him, when like Peter we walk on the stormy sea and are sinking, are the hours when our faith grows stronger. The felt need of God, makes us stretch out the hands of our faith, and take a stronger hold on God.

The stormy sea makes us look for the helping hand of Jesus. And we often learn more of faith in one month of darkness and storm, than in years of sunshine. When God would prepare us for higher work, for sweeter peace, for clearer light, he brings them by an increase of faith, and increases our faith by trying our faith.

In the early dawn of Brittain, Cuthbert left his sheep and went to preaching Christ. One day with three companions on the sea, he was tossed by a storm upon a dreary shore, and his comrades cried to him :

“Cuthbert, let us perish,—hope is o'er.
The furious tempest shuts the water path;
The snow-storm binds us on the bitter land.”

“Now, wherefore, friends, have ye so little faith?” God's servant said, and stretching forth his hand toward heaven,

He lifted up his reverent eyes and spake.—
“I thank thee Lord, the way is open there.
No storm above our heads in wrath shall break
And shut the heavenward path of love and prayer?”

The heavenward path of love and prayer is never shut to faith by earthly storms. It is opened by them. From the pillow of stones, we see the gates ajar. In the darkness of earth, are shown to us the infinite worlds above; our dreams become steps to heaven; and our

hills of difficulty, mountains of transfiguration.

“Who is among you that feareth the Lord, that obeyeth the voice of his servant, that walketh in darkness, and hath no light? Let him trust in the name of the Lord, and stay upon his God.”

The increase of faith brings with it three blessings.

1. It honors God. How can you honor God and his Word more than by believing what he says and living as if you believe it. It is the testimony of your whole nature—all you are and all you hope to be, to the truth and the faithfulness and love of God. St. John tells us that not to believe God is to call him a liar. You Christians are saying to the world either that God is *false* to his promises or that God is *true*. You dishonor him by unbelief. You honor him by faith, the utmost honor you can give him. A German writer gives this incident in the life of Johannes Bruce, the founder of the order of the Carmelites, who, though a Romish priest, was a saint indeed distinguished for his love to God and his faith. The convent was poor; and the friars, dependent on charity for daily bread, were often compelled to console themselves with the passage, “man does not live by bread alone.”

One day the brethren found when they had assembled for dinner, that their whole stock of

food was a single piece of dry bread. They sat down; they asked God's blessing upon their crust. Then Johannes arose and poured forth such words of encouragement and consolation concerning the love of Christ and the great promises he had given his people, that all of them arose, delighted and refreshed, and without partaking of their bread returned to their cells." They had scarcely reached them, when the bell rang at the convent gate, and a man entered with a large basket of provisions, which were carried with a letter to the prior who was on his knees praying. He read, the letter dropped from his hands, and he began to weep bitterly.

The porter, surprised, said, "Why do you weep? Have you not often said that we should weep for nothing but our sins?"

Johannes replied, "Brother, I do not weep without reason. Think how weak the Lord must see our faith to be, since he is unwilling to see us suffer want a single day without sending visible aid. He foresaw that before evening we should despond, unless he sent immediate help to our faith by means of this charitable gift. It is because we possess so little confidence in the rich Lord in whom we are encouraged to trust, that my tears flow."

The weakness of faith dishonors our rich Lord; but when you trust him in darkness and in trial, then the Lord can point angels and

men to you as he did to Job, and say: "See how this man trusts in me! Watch him, ye doubtful ones."

The Roman noblemen could give no greater proof of their confidence in their city and army, than when they bought the land on which their Carthaginian enemies were encamped around the city. And we can give no greater proof of our confidence in God, than by trusting God in the land which our enemies, darkness and sickness and trouble seem to possess, and acting as if God were their master and mightier than them all.

2. Increased faith gives increased strength for God's services, fuller sheaves at the Lord's harvest, more souls won to the Saviour. When you believe, you can help others believe. You can recommend with all your heart the promises which have borne you up. Just in proportion to your faith have you power with God and with men. The words spoken in Galilee are true to all times: According to your faith be it unto you.

3. Lastly, increased faith means rest and peace.

They tell us that Alexander conquered the whole world, and wept because there were no more to conquer. Never did man make a greater mistake than the Macedonian king. He had conquered but the least part of the world. The greater part he probably never tried to conquer.

Did he conquer the powers of evil that rule the soul? Did he conquer the world of trouble, of disease, of death, and subdue them to peace with him? Was he emperor over the world of sin and temptation? The greatest and most difficult of all that God gave him to conquer, he failed to conquer. Sin conquered him, and sickness and pain, and death.

But faith does that which Alexander could not do. It conquers the world. It gives peace in sorrow, in sickness, in loss and in pain. It triumphs over death. Over all these things, things present and things to come, all the principalities and powers of evil, it makes us "more than conquerors through him that loved us." But without faith in Christ, without unwavering trust in the love of God, what is left of good in life?

Upon the white sea sand
There sat a pilgrim band,
Telling the losses which their lives had known
While evening waned away
From breezy cliff and bay,
And the strong tides went out with weary moan.

One spake with quivering lip,
Of a fair freighted ship,
With all his household to the deep gone down.
But one had wilder woe,
For a fair face long ago,
Lost in the darker depths of a great town.

There were some who mourned their youth

With a most loving truth,
For its brave hopes and memories ever green,
And one upon the West,
Turned an eye that would not rest,
For far-off hills whereon its joy had been.

Some talked of vanished gold,
Some of proud honors told,
Some spake of friends that were their trust no more;
And one of a green grave,
Beside a foreign wave,
That made him sit so lonely on the shore.

But when their tales were done,
There spake among them one,
A stranger, seeming from all sorrow free.
"Sad losses have ye met,
But mine is heavier yet,
For a believing heart hath gone from me."

"Alas!" these pilgrims said,
"For the living and the dead,
For fortune's cruelty, for love's sure cross,
For the wreck of land and sea,
But however it came to thee—
Thine, stranger, is life's last and heaviest loss."

He that hath lost faith has lost all; but he that gains faith gains all things. He whose faith is increased, by viewing God's promises, by the experience of the faithful, by using the faith he already possesses, by the trials of his faith, shall honor God, shall be strong for life's work, and shall have "peace which flows like a river."

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